

Sermon
Harvest Thanksgiving
October 12th, 2025
Church of the Ascension, Ottawa
The Reverend Victoria Scot
Readings: Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalm 100, Philippians 4:4-9, John 6:25-35

“The Good Life”. What does it mean to live “The Good Life”? If we look around in our world and see this phrase — or if we “Google” — “The Good Life”, it’s likely to be linked to financial success, or material goods — “The Good Life: Fabulous Homes From Around the World”, or “The Good Life: Luxury Automobiles”. Here in Ottawa we have “Good Life” fitness, suggesting that a good life is one of health and physical fitness.

The fact that we are here together in this blessed place this morning tells me that we have recognized that there is more to “The Good Life” than luxury homes and cars. Even though our bodies are a gift, a home for our souls in this realm, I think we know that physical health and fitness alone isn’t the way to “The Good Life”.

Circumstances —what happens *to* us — is part of our humanity, and part of living “The Good Life”, but it’s only part of it. What we do in response to our circumstances - our agency - is also part of it. And, we can’t forget about emotion - how we feel along the way as we make this journey through life is another inextricable part of “The Good Life”.¹ Joy, sorrow, frustration, peace—they all have their place. Emotion makes us human; it connects us with one another, and with God.

Today we’re celebrating Harvest Thanksgiving. I think we can all agree that gratitude and thanks are important —that appreciation and gratitude and thanks are part of living “The Good Life”. We have the agency in our humanity to choose how we respond to our circumstances, and to attend to our emotions and allow space for gratitude.

We heard well known verses from Philippians this morning: Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice. There is —along with beauty and thriving in our

¹ <https://cct.biola.edu/living-good-life-miroslav-volf/>

world —there is overwhelming suffering. There is conflict. There is very real cause for despair. What if we're finding it hard to rejoice? What if we're finding it hard to give thanks? Does this mean that we're not living "The Good Life"?

I'm grateful for a conversation I had this week reminding me of the deeper meaning of this word "rejoice" in this passage from Philippians. The original Greek word translated as rejoice in this passage is χαίρω, charió, and it literally means "to be favourably disposed to God's grace". This makes rejoicing about so much more than giddy happiness, or even praise. It's a reminder that we have the agency to be open to God's grace in the most difficult and painful of circumstances. We have the agency to allow ourselves to feel all the emotions in a situation, but not to allow those emotions to close ourselves off to God's grace and presence. Paul writes this line while he is in a Roman prison. I can't imagine that there was much to rejoice in there in terms of the dictionary definition of showing joy or delight, but he was still experiencing God's grace in that place and was reminding readers to do the same. Paul's invitation to the Philippians, and the invitation to us is to rejoice *in the Lord* — to be open to experience God's love and grace — not to rejoice in circumstance or in emotion.

Our readings today also include the Gospel passage we've just heard, in which Jesus says "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty." What does this mean? No hunger, no thirst - Is this an invitation into "The Good Life"?

We need context — the bigger picture — around this passage. It begins with "When they found him on the other side of the sea...". Who is this "they"? Where had they been before? Why were they looking for him? Before these verses we heard today, John's Gospel offers us the story of the 'Feeding of the 5000'. After this miracle - this sign, Jesus knows that the crowd is about to take him by force and make him king, and so he withdraws to the mountain by himself. The disciples set off by sea for Capernaum without Jesus, and on stormy seas, they encounter him walking on the water, and they are terrified, but Jesus tells them not to be afraid, and they reach land. Today's scene is the next day, and the crowds that stayed on the other side, have come looking for Jesus.

At the beginning of today's Gospel passage, Jesus calls out the crowds who have come looking for him. He says: "You have come looking for me not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves".

Jesus is highlighting a different kind of hunger, here. He is saying don't overemphasize circumstance in this life. Stomach hunger, and the circumstances we find ourselves in — whether we have bread to eat — are part of our humanity, but Jesus is offering a reminder that this isn't all there is to this life - to "The Good Life" — and he is encouraging the crowds to differentiate between stomach hunger, and what we might call heart hunger. Identifying heart hunger lets us bring our agency and our emotion into the picture when we're searching and longing for fulfilment in this life. Identifying heart hunger connects us to a deeper, spiritual realm, and it has us bring circumstance, agency and emotion together in our lives. Identifying heart hunger opens us to connecting with a eternal reality - with a piece of eternity.

When Jesus says "I am the bread of life", this is an invitation into relationship. He is saying "I am the way to relationship and connection with God. I am the way to relationship and connection with others and with the world." He is highlighting that it is relationship that will satisfy the deepest hunger. It is relationship that will satisfy that heart hunger, which cannot be satisfied with food - or drink, or money, or cars, or luxury vacations — it is relationship — with God, and each other and our world - that will satisfy our deepest longings. It is relationship that will encourage us in our agency — in our choices about how we respond to the circumstances of our lives — and it is relationship - with God, and with each other — that will help us to navigate our emotions in all of life with its joys and sorrows and everything in between. Relationship is our way to "The Good Life". Rejoicing in God — remaining open to God's grace, trusting in God's love for us — and rejoicing in — being open to — loving connection is our way to "The Good Life".

This morning, may we experience God's grace here in this place as we sing and pray together. May that grace make space in our hearts and minds for gratitude and thanksgiving along with our sorrows and our deepest longings. May this time here together remind us that "The Good Life" is ours in and through Jesus — in and through his suffering and death and Resurrection, forever connecting us to God, and in and through the way he shows us how to live. When you come up for

Communion, receive it and know that Jesus is the bread of life: food for heart and soul. May our relationships with God and with each other help us to use our agency to bless others when we leave this place. May those relationships help us to be honest in our emotions in every circumstance, and may we rejoice in the Lord —may we be open to experiencing God's endless love and grace— always. In Jesus name. Amen.